



**Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa  
Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme**

**Livestock Trade and Credible Certification for COMESA:  
Strategies and Tools**



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*The **COMESA Green Pass** is a system of certification of agricultural commodities proposed to facilitate trade. Traders in high value markets are sometimes sceptical of certification provided by developing countries in terms of health and safety of commodities, creating yet another barrier to accessing those markets. There are strategies and tools to support credibility of certification for trade in livestock products. Making sure that they are in place and functional is fundamental to acceptance of the Green Pass as an assurance of safety and quality.*

**What makes certification credible?**

Certification is credible when it is carried out by competent persons and supported by technical evidence that will testify to its veracity. For livestock commodities, this means that certification relating to animal health before slaughter should be provided by a qualified veterinarian; meat inspection should be carried out by a qualified meat inspector or veterinarian; and process and product certification should be carried out by a person knowledgeable in those fields. Where necessary, the certification should be

supported by diagnostic data from a laboratory that is capable of carrying out the tests. Certification that an area is free of one or more diseases should be supported by surveillance data indicating that the declaration is based on monitoring and investigation that would reveal the presence of the disease. Finally, the process of certification should be transparent and clearly free of any influence from interested parties.

**What are the pillars on which credible certification of livestock commodities and products rests?**

The following structures and practices should be in place to support certification of livestock commodities and products:

- A national veterinary service that is able to function according to the norms provided by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE);
- Adequate legislation in terms of animal disease control, food safety and management of veterinary drugs;
- Access to veterinary diagnostic laboratory services;

- Epidemiological data derived from surveillance for diseases of international importance;
- Regular, timely and transparent reporting of the occurrence of listed diseases to the OIE;
- Credible and auditable implementation of HACCP in livestock commodity and product processing to guarantee food safety.

Ensuring that the competent authorities (National and Regional Green Pass Authorities) are compliant with international management standards (ISO 9000) is helpful in assuring independence and transparency.

### **National veterinary services**

The challenge of strengthening of veterinary services, often weak or perceived as weak in developing countries, has been taken up by the OIE, and their PVS tool is used for internal and external reviews of veterinary services to enable weaknesses to be identified and addressed. A number of COMESA countries have already benefited from this peer review process. Strengthening of veterinary services is an ongoing process that includes peer review, capacity building and continuing professional development. This is enhanced when opportunities are identified or created at regional level in order to harmonise veterinary service provision in COMESA.

### **Legislation**

Harmonisation of legislation is one of the stated aims of COMESA, and this is important for trade in livestock commodities. The legislation for disease control tends to be reasonably similar in aim if not in wording in most countries. This may not, however, be the case for legislation for the management of veterinary drugs. International trade in livestock commodities increasingly depends on ability to demonstrate that they are safe in terms of drug residues, as well as in respect of animal and human pathogens. Testing procedures for drug residues are expensive and can best be provided at regional rather than national level. However, adequate legislation in terms of veterinary drug registration and dispensation goes a long way toward reassuring importers that commodities are unlikely to contain harmful residues.

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### **Further information**

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### **Veterinary diagnostic laboratory services**

The ability to rapidly diagnose and therefore manage animal diseases is vital for the prevention of widespread disease outbreaks that can lead to lengthy trade bans. By its strategy to ensure a regional laboratory network that includes reference laboratories with links to international reference laboratories, COMESA has taken an important step forward. The test will be to ensure the capacity and sustainability of the laboratories by overcoming the major challenge to veterinary laboratories in sub-Saharan Africa – lack of samples to maintain skills! It will also be important, particularly for the reference laboratories, to prioritise tests that are important for trade and work towards obtaining ISO accreditation for them within the region.

### **Surveillance for livestock diseases**

Adequate surveillance for livestock diseases requires the active participation of livestock producers and traders in terms of reporting unusual disease events and liaison with the animal health authorities, as well as active seeking of disease/infection on their part. This requires awareness creation and training, which form part of the COMESA Green Pass strategy, and must be a dynamic and ongoing process. It is important to record negative data, i.e. the absence of disease, as well as disease incidence, as this demonstrates that surveillance is taking place! Epidemiological databases must be constantly updated to ensure current reporting and transparency.

### **Disease reporting**

Member countries of OIE are obliged to report unusual disease events by means of immediate notifications and to provide six-monthly and annual reports on their disease situation to the OIE. These reports are available on the OIE website WAHID interface. Completing and submitting these reports promptly is important for demonstrating transparency. Efforts should be made at the regional level to ensure that all COMESA member countries are assiduous in fulfilling their obligations in terms of disease reporting, even when listed diseases are absent, as in some of the oceanic islands, to meet their obligations of transparency.